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ABSTRACT

IN A SPEECH DELIVERED IN JULY OF 1968, DR. JOHN J. KIRK OF THE NEW JERSEY STATE SCHOOL OF CONSERVATION, ELABORATED ON THE OUTDOOR EDUCATION MOVEMENT IN THE UNITED STATES, CANADA, AND OTHER COUNTRIES. DR. KIRK CONCENTRATED CHIEFLY ON TRENDS IN OUTDOOR EDUCATION AND WHAT INFLUENCES THE TRENDS MAY HAVE ON A NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL SCALE. DISCUSSED IN SOME DETAIL WERE THE RESIDENT CENTERS FOR OUTDOOR EDUCATION, SCHOOL-SITE LABORATORIES, IN-SERVICE TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAMS, GRADUATE AND UNDERGRADUATE PROGRAMS IN OUTDOOR EDUCATION, AND THE NEEDS AND PURPOSES OF OUTDOOR EDUCATION AS SEEN BY GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS. (DE)

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
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TRENDS IN OUTDOOR EDUCATION

International Congress for Health, Physical Education, and Recreation
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My dear Colleagues:

It is a pleasure for me to have the opportunity to discuss with so distinguished a group of educators the patterns and trends which seem to be taking place in the outdoor education movement in the United States, Canada, and in many other countries throughout the world. It seems quite appropriate to be discussing outdoor education at this Congress because the fields of physical education and recreation have produced so many of the leaders in the outdoor education movement throughout the world. Since the term "outdoor education" has a variety of connotations and since the term may not be familiar to all of you, I would like to take a moment to share with you the definition which we use at our School of Conservation and which, I might add, has been accepted and implemented in many other outdoor education centers in the United States and elsewhere. We like to think of outdoor education as the method which utilizes the natural environment to cultivate in students a reverence for life through an ecological exploration of the interdependence of living things and to form in them a land ethic illustrating man's temporary stewardship of the land. The one word in this definition which I would like to highlight for you

RC 003992

is "method." Outdoor education is not a content field but rather a method of teaching which, if properly applied, can do much to enhance and supplement the total learning experience for children. In order to implement this philosophy, all subject areas of the curriculum are utilized--literature, art, music, social studies, mathematics, physical education, and recreation. Some educational administrators still confuse outdoor education with recreation, while others consider it exclusively in the domain of the natural sciences. This is most unfortunate, since a good outdoor education program includes not only recreation and natural science but also every subject area in the curriculum. I believe that the misconception that outdoor education is exclusively recreation developed because the field of recreation has provided so many leaders in the outdoor education movement. However, outdoor education has come to be much more than any one subject, as you will see during the course of this discussion.

During the past two decades there have been many research projects conducted which tend to illustrate rather conclusively that the teaching of every subject in the school curriculum can be improved if an outdoor setting is utilized for the presentation of some of the subject material. The reason is rather obvious to any teacher who recalls one of the fundamental laws of learning. We can all remember the principle which states that through the use of additional senses, children will learn more rapidly and retain material for a longer period of time. Through a utilization of the out-of-doors teachers have an opportunity to present material in a manner which incorporates more of the senses in the learning process than could ever be achieved in a classroom setting. This realization has been one of the major factors influencing the growth and development of outdoor education in many countries throughout the world.

During the early years of the outdoor education movement in the United States, which would be the early 1940's, the few school systems that included this technique in the school curriculum conducted a resident experience at a camp or outdoor school for children in either the fifth or sixth grade. Twenty years ago there were fewer than five hundred such outdoor education centers in the United States. Today there are over fifteen hundred resident centers providing living experiences in the out-of-doors for children from grade 3 through senior high school, and the length of the resident experience varies from two and a half days to five days in duration. There have also been many new resident centers constructed in Canada, Australia, and many other countries throughout the world. Just before my trip to this beautiful country, I learned that the city of Toronto in Canada has set aside a million dollars to build a new resident facility for the public school children in that city. Now in the United States approximately forty of the fifty states have resident centers providing some type of outdoor education experience for public school children. Of course, some of the states have been more progressive than others, and I am pleased to report that in my state of New Jersey over 20 per cent of our school-age children are now receiving some type of outdoor education experience. This would place the state of New Jersey in the top five or six states in the United States in the field of outdoor education. However, we are not satisfied with this percentage, since there are still close to 80 per cent of our school-age children in New Jersey who do not have opportunities to learn through living experiences in an outdoor setting.

Nevertheless, there has been significant progress in the development of resident centers during the past few years, and I feel quite certain that in the not too distant future more school administrators will see the

advantages of providing this type of experience for school children, and ultimately all youngsters will have the opportunity for a resident experience.

In addition to accelerating the rate of learning in many of the subject areas, a resident experience has a by-product or concomitant value in that it provides the teachers with the opportunity of viewing the children in many situations and under many conditions which do not exist in the classroom. By gaining this additional insight, the teacher frequently becomes better equipped to cope with the problems which the children bring to the classroom. Of course, there is another side to that coin, and it is that the children are also provided with an opportunity to see their teacher in quite a different light. The casual dress and the informal atmosphere help the youngsters to realize that their teachers are human beings afterall. This too contributes to more positive relationships between teacher and student back in the classroom.

Another exciting trend that has taken place during the past ten or fifteen years is the development of school-site laboratories. What this means is that a public school may have two, three, or more acres located on the school property which have been left in their natural state in order that children from kindergarten up through the various grades may have daily experiences in the out-of-doors. On these tracts of land there may be a nature trail, a small pond, various gardens, and frequently some outdoor recreation facilities such as a field archery range, an orienteering course, or a photography blind. On these school-site laboratories children of all ages are able to participate in meaningful learning experiences in all the subject areas of the curriculum. For instance there may be sessions on literature interpretation in the out-of-doors where the children write their own poetry. Many of the children in our country enjoy utilizing the

Japanese literary form of haiku in these outdoor sessions. In addition, the children may participate in more meaningful experiences in music, art, and social studies where they are able to learn more about the area in which they live and perhaps develop a deeper understanding regarding the importance of the natural resources of the area that served as a catalyst in the development of their community. The pattern which seems to be emerging is that kindergarten children through fourth grade youngsters utilize the school-site laboratory for the majority of their outdoor education experiences, and in grades 5 and 6 these daily experiences are combined with a sustained living experience at a resident outdoor education center.

In order to implement programs of this type, it has become necessary to provide additional in-service training for teachers. The colleges and universities which have traditionally trained teachers in the past did not include adequate techniques and methods for a proper utilization of the out-of-doors. This is not necessarily a criticism of our teacher-training institutions, since the field of outdoor education has just recently achieved recognition and significance in the school curriculum and only during the past two decades has this shortcoming in teacher preparation been realized. Many of the more progressive teacher-training institutions are correcting this deficiency and including units on the methodology of outdoor education in their course work. However, since this deficiency does exist, school administrators are now frequently calling upon the universities and colleges and other departments of Government to provide professors and resource personnel to conduct weekend workshops which will raise the level of understanding and the competence of their faculties in order that the teachers may function adequately and comfortably in an outdoor setting. Some school districts have even gone to the extent of providing release time, which means that on a given day each week classes

will be dismissed early in order that the teachers may participate in training sessions designed to help them utilize more effectively the school-site laboratory or the resident center for outdoor education. The approach in all of these workshops is interdepartmental, illustrating how all subject areas may be included and how all teachers in the school system may contribute to a more meaningful living experience for children in the out-of-doors. Some school systems have taken this concept a step further and provide a mobile unit or trailer which is fully equipped with the science equipment, library books, and other such materials that might be necessary to conduct a session on the school-site laboratory. This mobile unit will be brought to the school-site lab by the outdoor education specialist on certain days during the week, and the classroom teachers will be called upon to assist the specialist in outdoor education and to utilize the special equipment in the implementation of the outdoor education experience.

Another interesting innovation in higher education in the United States has been the development of graduate programs in outdoor education and conservation. At the present time there are over one hundred colleges and universities offering a Master's degree in outdoor education and conservation, with fifteen to twenty institutions of higher learning offering a Doctoral degree in this field. The unique feature of graduate programs in outdoor education is the interdepartmental aspect of the course offerings. Most graduate programs in the field include courses in the natural sciences, social sciences, natural resource economics, outdoor recreation, and research methods. Individuals earning a graduate degree in outdoor education are usually employed by a school system as a coordinator of the outdoor education program. Such a person employed by a school system would work with the classroom teachers in the development and implementation

of teaching materials and also assume the administrative responsibility related to the program. On the basis of the present growth patterns, I predict that within the next thirty years most of the larger school systems in the United States and also in Canada will have an outdoor education coordinator on the staff just as they now employ a supervisor of physical education or a director of special education.

Another interesting characteristic of the outdoor education field is that there are very few undergraduate programs offering a major in outdoor education. Some colleges and universities do offer a minor in outdoor education, but the consensus of opinion among the professionals in the field seems to be that specialization in outdoor education at the undergraduate level is somewhat undesirable and that a fundamental background in any one of the many educational fields is far more advantageous. On this foundation a graduate program can then be designed to meet the needs and interests of the individual in question.

During the past six or eight years, I have also observed an increased awareness as to the need and purpose of outdoor education among Government officials, and today in many states in the United States, the Department of Education employs a full-time person with the responsibility of coordinating, developing, and implementing programs in outdoor education and conservation for the local school districts. A few states have gone to the extent of developing a curriculum guideline for all subject areas, kindergarten through grade 12, and this master plan is then made available to the various public school systems and districts in the state. The Federal Government is also playing an increasing role in the outdoor education field by providing considerable sums of money to public school districts through the provisions of the Elementary-Secondary Education Act.

The availability of Federal funds has made a most significant impact on the growth and development of programs in the United States. Now you may have a question in your mind as to the cause of this increased awareness and interest in outdoor education which has been evidenced in the United States, Canada, Australia, Japan, and many other countries throughout the world. The reason, I believe, is the most interesting trend or change that has occurred in the history of the outdoor education movement to date. As I indicated earlier, there have been many studies conducted in colleges and universities indicating that through a utilization of the out-of-doors children learn more rapidly and are able to retain the subject matter for a much longer period of time. This has led professionals in the outdoor education movement to the conclusion that the major purpose of outdoor education is the enrichment of the curriculum. However, during the early 1960's the problems of air pollution, water pollution, and other such examples of mismanagement of natural resources began to receive much public attention. In the United States at that time our most eloquent spokesman on behalf of conservation and of correcting these difficulties was our late and beloved President John F. Kennedy. Primarily through his efforts the term "conservation" took on a new meaning in our country and began to include man and his relationship to his total environment. This increased concern for the problems of conservation of human and natural resources caused outdoor educators to stop and re-evaluate the purpose and goals of the outdoor education movement. It became quite clear to many of us that through outdoor education we had the most effective vehicle for changing attitudes and developing new concepts regarding man's relationship to his total environment and man's dependence on the proper use of our natural resources in order to sustain human life on

this planet. As a result of this realization, the emphasis or major purpose of outdoor education began to shift, and it started to focus more intensely on conceptual learning experiences which were intended to illustrate the interrelationships of life and the importance of preserving and perpetuating all forms of life on this planet in order that man, who represents the ultimate of living beings, might be able to continue to survive and thrive in this world.

This new emphasis in the outdoor education movement tends to stress the development of the reverence-for-life concept that I mentioned earlier, and if this concept is properly conceived, it enables the child to look at himself quite differently, for he is able to see just where he fits into the total spectrum of life and living things and is better able to understand his role and purpose in this great adventure of life. Once a child begins to realize the significance of life, he is better able to understand and appreciate his responsibility to use wisely the land and all other resources placed at man's disposal. This represents the practical application of the land ethic which I also mentioned earlier.

While discussing these concepts with my distinguished colleague Professor Shinshiro Ebashi of the University of Tokyo, whom you have just heard speak and who was a visiting professor on the School of Conservation faculty last year, we arrived at the conclusion that attitude formation in conservation could easily become an international means of communication which could transcend language barriers and cultural differences and perhaps assist educators to develop in children a greater understanding of the brotherhood and interdependence we all share. It is for this reason that I am here at this Congress in Dublin in hopes that perhaps within the framework of I.C.H.P.E.R. a separate section might be formed where outdoor educators from various countries throughout the world might gather

annually to exchange ideas and improve the techniques and methods utilized in the outdoor education movement just as you now use these meetings to develop a greater understanding of the methods and techniques that are being used in health, physical education, and recreation in your various countries. If Professor Ebashi and I are successful in generating sufficient interest among those of you who have outdoor education programs in your countries, then I feel certain that we will all take a significant step forward in advancing the concepts of this new frontier in education which we call outdoor education. Through such a sharing of ideas, all of us who believe so strongly in a utilization of the out-of-doors will be able to provide more meaningful experiences for the children and students in our various countries, and we will collectively move a long way down the trail toward fostering the reverence-for-life concept which tends to illustrate the brotherhood of man and the common bond and goals we all share.

Again, I wish to thank you for the privilege of sharing with you this afternoon a few of the trends and innovations of the outdoor education movement as I am able to interpret them, and I certainly hope that in the very near future this new section for outdoor education leaders within the framework of I.C.H.P.E.R. will become a reality, and soon all of us in outdoor education, regardless of where we happen to labor, will be able to meet annually and share our ideas, our successes, and our failures in order that all children throughout the world will one day be able to enjoy more profitable and meaningful learning experiences in the great out-of-doors. Thank you.